

Korea's Road to Peacekeeping

In 1918, Woodrow Wilson called for self-determination of nations. On March 1st, 1919, a year after Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points policy was announced, Koreans participated in a non-violent protest against Japanese imperialist rule in Korea. It was unsuccessful, but it is regarded as a national holiday in Korea due to it being one of the earliest resistance towards Japan. While the March First Movement inspires national pride, it should be taught to prevent prejudice rather than racism. The March First Movement should be remembered as a part of history that demonstrates the importance of sovereign rule and non-violent protest.

I attended a March First reenactment in New York's Central park on March 1st, 2013. I recited the second paragraph of the Korean Declaration of Independence on stage, which stated Korea's history of oppression from foreigners and how Korea had every right to exist and contribute to the international community. As I announced the text, I felt very patriotic. I'm sure the gathered mass felt the same way, as our voices filled Central Park with "Manseh!" Acknowledging Korea's struggle to be independent made me feel truly Korean.

National pride brings people of the same background together, such as the gathering of people in the demonstration I participated in. However, there is a fine line between national pride and racism. I believe discrimination comes from vindication and the belief of racial superiority. Many Koreans I know are bigoted against Japanese people and foreigners. My mother at one point had a negative regard towards me listening to Japanese music, saying how I shouldn't listen to it because the Japanese are "evil". In my generation, young Koreans with no interest in Korea's history curse the Japanese. They are the product of scorn passed from our grandfathers. Yes, the Japanese treatment of its protectorate, Korea, was cruel. Yes, the government protests the comfort women statues, and officials do deny the past and retard their war crimes. However,

individual persons, or even cultures, should not be generalized as wicked because of what their country did.

History is a key to the future. It should not be used as a tool to incite racism and separation, or to cover up the negative deeds of a country. Instead, history should be transparent for all sides of a conflict, to set an example and so that the past does not repeat itself. The March First Movement is a keystone in Korea's history. The efforts of the people who participated in it should not be ignored. Korea's struggle should be acknowledged by the country's suppressor, and taught without bias in Korea. The March First Movement represents Korea's fight for freedom, and also shows the importance of national sovereignty and peaceful resistance.

National sovereignty means the state is independent of its rule. The March First Movement was inspired by Wilson's Fourteen Points plan, which stated that people of a distinct culture should rule themselves. Korean people were forced to discard their traditions under the Japanese occupation. The Samil Movement protested against this cruel treatment, expressing their want national sovereignty. Their efforts for the right can be reflected in today's policies and issues. Even today the right of national sovereignty is not granted to all nations. While most countries are independent by name, their sovereignty is infringed upon by more powerful countries. Countries recognized as "failed states" are supported by the international community. But the intervention is beneficial towards the humans inhabiting said countries. But people still express their want for a sovereign country, such as those living in Somalia, which was recognized as the most "failed" in 2012. Some countries such as North Korea make violent threats when sovereignty is imposed on, such as their threats against the sanctions placed on the despotic country. Contrastingly, the March First Movement is an example of a peaceful motion for independence and improved conditions.

The March First Movement was rallied by students and leaders who wanted to break free from Japanese rule. There were many non-violent protests organized in many different cities of Korea starting on March First. Unfortunately the efforts were met by violence. The Japanese fired at the demonstrators and imprisoned many. The Samil Movement sheds light on the importance of peaceful protest. The movement did not bring independence, but it granted Koreans more rights, such as the right to limited press and civilians were allowed in the police force. It also influenced non-violent protests in other parts of the world, such as India. Non-violent resistance is an effective way for the masses to attain what they want. The March First Movement should be remembered because it is vital to know there are alternatives to missiles and bloodshed when gaining liberties.

The March First Movement sheds light on the importance of national sovereignty and peaceful protest. It is an important part of Korea's history, but it should be recognized not as a tool for breeding racism, but for ending prejudice. I hope for Japan and Korea to negotiate its past conflict for the future as modern nations working for world peace in the international community. Although it was unsuccessful in granting Korea's freedom in 1919, the March First Movement teaches lessons applicable to today.

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